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THE CHOICE



A Play in Three Acts

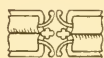
BY

OCTAVINE LOPEZ DREEBEN



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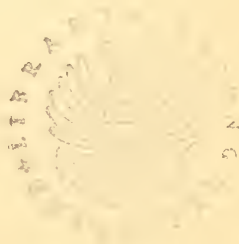
A Play in Three Acts

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SEP 3 1914

C. C. D. 38043

Cast

JOHN TALBOT

GEORGE MEYER

TROLENE GODEZ

MRS. GODEZ, her mother,
a widow

JEROME BLUM

SALLIE TRAVIS

LAMBERT GODEZ

MR. BOLLATER

AUNT GUILLY

UNCLE LIGE

MRS. JOHNSON

HOSTESS, guests, etc.



The Choice

ACT I.

Scene: On right a portico of Colonial mansion surrounded by flowers; a space away enormous blooming crepe myrtles, overhung with moss. An avenue of oaks leading out and off the stage. Late in afternoon; sun bursts forth triumphantly before it finally goes to rest.

JOHN TALBOT.

It is now two years since Mr. Godez died, and the change we apprehended in the beginning has now come to pass. I understand Trolene and her mother are preparing to move away, may even leave tonight.

JEROME.

Are you sure? I heard something about it and came to find out.

JOHN TALBOT.

Sallie just now arrived with the news, so I came over to see Trolene.

SALLIE.

Ever since Mr. Godez died that rich uncle of Trolene's has wanted them to come to him. Though they felt at some time they must move, they have hesitated, dreading to leave their old home and friends.

JOHN TALBOT.

Then why are they going?

SALLIE.

It seems he has written another letter, more importunate than ever. His wife's death, leaving him alone in a large home, he feels more keenly their isolated, unprotected state. He wants them to end it by coming to live with him.

JEROME.

(Delighted.) Now, I am glad they are going!

JOHN TALBOT.

(Snecringly.) You! Why should you care!

JEROME.

She will now have a chance to know something of her people.

SALLIE.

That is what her uncle writes. He wants her to study their history, to know their struggles, to imbibe their customs, to know the beauties of their religion.

JOHN TALEOT.

(Sarcastically.) So living among such an exalted people she marry one of them.

JEROME.

Why shouldn't she?

JOHN TALEOT.

(Glaring at Jerome.) Why should she? Her people are here. There is as much of our blood in her veins as there is of that other. By the largest right—that of possession—we ought to keep her here. That has never been an issue in her life. Why should they want to make it one now? To isolate, to designate her as one!

JEROME.

Why shouldn't they want to designate her as one, let her stand out, clear and strong as a noble one!

JOHN TALEOT.

You, Jerome! I might have known that you, a representative incarnate, would say that.

JEROME.

(Sadly.) I am not representative of my race; I am sorry if you think so. I am only a poor degenerate offspring of a noble stock.

JOHN TALEOT.

It is with full realization of all your shortcomings that I again state you are representative. I and most of the people around here have the bluest blood running in our veins. I am descended from Lord Talbot of England, who had a long line of noble ancestors. Sallie's ancestry is also of the highest. We have only tolerated you and your father in this community; he is a good merchant, that is all. We never consider him as anything else. As for you—

JEROME.

Not one word more, John Talbot. I have a purer, a nobler strain running through my veins than you. Thank goodness, I am not glutted and scurried with the noble blood of a rake and rouse!

JOHN TALEOT.

If you dare say another word against my noble ancestor, I'll strike—

SALLIE.

(Preventing.) Stop! None of that. You boys are always on the point of quarreling. What difference does it make who your ancestors were? It's what you are that counts. Most of us who have famous ancestors use up our lives with thinking of them, and amount to nothing; those who have none, accomplish something, and start an ancestry for those to follow. Here come Trolene and her shadow.

(Enter Trolene, with old black mammy Guilly.)

TROLENE.

I waited for you to come to me, but as you seemed enamored of this spot, I thought I had better come to you, especially as a fight seemed imminent. With Sallie sole witness, I could resist no longer. Did you come to see me or just select this as a beautiful spot on which to fight and die? Why such gestures and glances between John and Jerome, that arresting arm of Sallie's—the much mooted question of ancestors again? Some kindly person ought to really let you fight it out, so put an end to these volcanic eruptions.

SALLIE.

I have just been telling them of your leaving us.

TROLENE.

That surely is not what caused the quarrel. Just think, I have finally persuaded dear old Aunt Guilly to go with us. Some part of this dear old country to be with me?

JOHN TALEOT.

Take me: I am native.

AUNT GUILLY.

Dis heah white chile kin make poah ole Ant Guilly do mos' ennything Course I has to go wid her, caise I jes couldn't lib heah widout her. I didn't need no persuadin' to go wid her, but whar she's going. But for whar she should go away out Wes' where dere's cowboys that make guns say biff, bang ehberry time dey looks at you, and throws ropes round yer necks ef dey kin—for de Lord I jes kaint see why we hab to go there. I jes shudder whenever I thinks about it, and sometimes I wakes up in de middle of de night feelin' dere's a rope around my neck. Lord bless my soul, but I'se afraid to go!

TROLENE.

Dear old Aunt Guilly is going to save me from the cowboys, or be in at the death, so we can all go together. There's Uncle Lige, Aunt Guilly. You had better go talk with him about getting our things ready. Tell him to have the carriage about seven.

SALLIE.

I am going into the house, Trolene, to see your mother for a while. Be sure that John and Jerome go their separate ways.

(Sallie exit into house. John and Jerome stare at each other; the situation becoming tense. Jerome decides to go.)

JEROME.

(Taking Trolene's hand, looking steadily into her eyes.) Good-bye, Trolene. We may never meet again, but this I want to say: Listen to your Uncle, become one with your people. We need such as you. (With one final glare at John, departs.)

JOHN TALEOT.

A funny fellow, Jerome. He acts as though the world had done him a wrong. I believe we are what you would call natural enemies.

TROLENE.

He is what the world and his race have made him. I am afraid it is that which makes you natural enemies more than your individual selves.

JOHN TALEOT.

Let's not discuss it—nothing so dry as Jerome. The time is too precious to waste with him. It's no fun to argue with a girl—not some girls. Let's really talk of something nice; of you for instance; that always pleases me. Are you really, truly going—I mean to live?

TROLENE.

Yes, it is true. We have been a long time deciding; it is like being uprooted, leaving our old home and friends. But concluding it best, we decided to go. We leave tonight.

JOHN TALEOT.

I don't see how you can go; you are so well thought of here; your family such a representative one. You have stood for everything that was high. Your father even fought side by side with the other members; your mother has been a mother to all the homeless boys, consequently, idolized. Your home has been a place of rest and pleasure for those of us who have not been so fortunately situated. We would be just stranded, can't you see that? On your mother's side you are connected with some of us, you are one of us. We all want you, need you, love you.

TROLENE.

It certainly is kind of you to say so; it is exhilarating, even if one thinks the coloring a little too strong, knowing it painted by your dear imagination.

JOHN TALEOT.

There is no place on earth you could ever go and occupy the same high position, plus the love and respect you now enjoy. Trolene, do nothing we all know will cause you regret.

TROLENE.

I fear what you say is all too true. Love doesn't usually thrive in the rays that emanate from a high position. Should a human being of family enjoying both ever be foolish enough to give them up, I doubt if in the law of balances it would ever come to them again. I am not sure we are such a family as you have pictured, but if it were so it could not keep us, now that we have decided it is right for us to go. Circumstances which have happened since my father's death, our lack of business ability and self-protection, has made it impracticable for us to remain here..

JOHN TALBOT.

But you can have a natural protector—

TROLENE.

However, what you have said is the greatest kind of comfort, whether it be really true or not. It is like wine in one's veins, so exhilarating that one has courage to face the future..

JOHN TALBOT.

I was telling you real truths to make you hesitate about going.

TROLENE.

We can't draw back now. I'm afraid we can never come back to this either. My mother and I both felt we must go at some time, but I was not prepared to encounter such change of life and ideas as I am about to; so that I scarcely know whether I want to go or not.

TALBOT.

Please, then, do not go. Trolene; remain here happy in the recollections of a luxuriant childhood, a promising and beautiful womanhood, free from vexing cares and problems, happy amid these ancestral vales—a veritable Eden, your world and mine! I love you, have always loved you ever since we were children together. Now, with all the fervor of a man's love I beg you to be mine.

TROLENE.

You care for me in that way!

TALBOT.

In that way and no other! A realization of what your departure meant to me, how very barren existence would be without you, has made me a man full grown, with all the ideas of fighting for and possessing the woman he loves.

TROLENE.

Oh, John, how I wish you hadn't spoken as you have! I wanted to think of this part of my life as a fairy existence, a dream life of things that happened beautifully and marvelously, without seeing the human effort behind—of our lives together as wholesome, sweet and pure; the rainbow tinted showers of glowing childhood memories. Now, I shall have to leave with a feeling of regret that I cannot satisfy you..

TALBOT.

But why can't you satisfy me? It's just as you say. We've had such glorious times together, enjoyed each other so much. In fact, I cannot remember a quarrel or any time your seeming adverse to me; always in games, or where there was a chance to show preference,, you invariably chose me.

TROLENE.

Yes, you are right. I do care, but not the way you mean. Those were childhood games. A choice of a life partner demands maturer judgment.

TALBOT.

Where love is, there can be no judgment; one's senses are obscured, one's whole being vibrates and throbs with (makes a movement to catch her in his arms; she eludes him).

TROLENE.

That is why I know I cannot marry you. Just as knowledge of ripened love has made you full-grown; so have I from pondering over problems my uncle's letters portend, and feeling the responsibility of this critical move, without full realization until now, attained womanhood. I know now that I cannot marry you; I could not argue, nor reason, nor think if I loved you enough for that.

TALBOT.

Marry me whatever kind of love it may be; the kind I want may come later..

TROLENE.

It is possible had I never thought of leaving here, we might have married; possible also we might have been contented; but now that these matters have come from my uncle, new vistas are opened to me; old situations take on new lights. I have watched you with Jerome—certainly not a marvelous example of ideal manhood, one that would stand out clear in a multitude; neither is he a positive mark for scorn or ridicule. You need not Damon and Pythias each other. Neither ought the sight of one be so revolting that mere contiguity makes you prepare for battle. I know now what it is that makes you dislike each other—a thing I was never before cognizant of—innate racial antipathy.

TALBOT.

Possibly so. I know very little of his race, but that little is enough—

TROLENE.

(With a startled, yet quizzical look in her eyes.) What a strange and lurid remark! Then there is such a thing as—

TALBOT.

I don't know why it is. I am yet a boy. My mother never expressly warned me nor taught me to hate them. The rote the Sunday schools teach I have almost forgotten. Yet, from fear or hate, I cannot bear—

TROLENE.

The Sunday schools, that is one root of the evil; they ought to teach you to dwell in peace and amity, but instead of that they narrow your horizon and help to perpetuate the prejudice.

TALBOT.

Pshaw! Why discuss things settled long before us? It's jolly to make Jerome angry, but you are not like Jerome; you do not belong to his race; you need not fight his battles. There has never been a question of difference of race with you, and there never will be if you live here and marry me. You do not look like them; your marriage to me will blot out all traces of it. I beg you to be mine. (Takes her hand.) I hunger for you. (Puts his arms around her.) Trolene, my whole being cries out for you. (Clasps her in his arms and crushes her to him; she draws away.) If you cannot be mine now, promise at least to live here. Give me a chance to try to win you.

TROLENE.

It is impossible to accede to either of your wishes. I owe it to myself to go. I have not the right to happiness through ignorance; real happiness comes from knowledge and choice. I have never felt any difference; whether it is I, or my environment, I know not. My own experiences would consequently lead me to believe they do not exist. But if there are such feelings I want to know them, all of them—the storms, the little ripples, the undercurrents. You see now why I must go to learn for myself. You have made me see there is something to all of this. But let's say no more about it. (Puts her hand on his shoulder.) Forgive me, but you must know that I can not now, nor could I ever, comply with either of your

requests. Let's resume as nearly as possible our former relationship. I must go into the house to prepare for my journey, for some of our friends will be here to say good-bye. Will you come in? (Starts toward house.)

TALBOT.

Not so quick, Trolene. I have a word to say. I've always considered you mine; no alternative has entered my head. I've made up my mind to have you, and I'm not going to stop trying now. I'm going to make every effort to get you; I am going to think success, not failure. (Pause.) Should I fail—this is no threat, but a message surcharged with meaning—you will certainly regret it: if not your rejection of me, then the consequences of it. I do not know what trump cards Fate will give me, but I will play them when the time comes. Think on this before you give me a final No!

TROLENE.

You cannot frighten me. (Catches hand gaily.) Come, be John the boy, once more. I must run into the house and change my clothes. Come in and talk with mother, while this transformation goes on behind the scenes.

TALBOT.

No, I'll stay out here awhile. Be quick about it, and think of what I've said.

(Exit Trolene. Enter a good many people, broken-down aristocrats, a sprinkling of Colonels and their wives, different characters to be seen in an aloof aristocratic village and on plantations, who live mostly in the past, modified only by styles slow to arrive. John Talbot paces back and forth. Uncle Lige comes round, deposits the grips on porch.)

UNCLE LIGE.

What's de matter, Marse John? Pears like somefin ail you.

TALBOT.

No, nothing.

UNCLE LIGE.

Sorry, 'caise lil Miss is goin'?

TALBOT.

Go on; let me alone.

UNCLE LIGE.

She'll come back.

TALBOT.

(Quickly.) Do you think so, Uncle Lige?

UNCLE LIGE.

She won't like it there widout Uncle Lige, and all dis house——

TALBOT.

(Angry.) Shut up!

UNCLE LIGE.

(Ingratiatingly.) If she don' come purty soon, you kin go bring her, Marse John..

TALBOT.

(Quickly.) You think she would come!

UNCLE LIGE.

(Grinning still more.) A little persuadin' would sholey fetch her.

TALBOT.

(Throwing him a coin.) Here, take this and go about your business. Good evening to all of you (as different ones come up). You may as well stay out here, for Trolene will be out in a moment.

(Some of them, however, go inside; some stand around in groups, conversing. Enter Trolene, dressed for travel.)

LADY.

(A beaming, motherly soul, kissing her on forehead.) I have brought you some quince preserves; you always liked them so. I made them just

for you—I believe they are better than usual. Moses! (an old, gray-haired darkey draws near.) Step up lively! I want you to bring them around to the house so Mrs. Godez can pack them with her things.

RESIDENT NO. TWO.

I've brought you a cutting from that sunset rose you used to steal powers from. I hope it will live and flourish. Whenever it blooms, you can think of the old folks back home.

TROLENE.

Thank you, so much. I shall water it and try to make it grow, but I won't need that to make me think of you.

UNCLE LIGE.

(Half running and hobbling in.) Ch, lil Miss, heah's a box Marse Henry sent—lowed as he couldn't come, caise he's down wid de rheumatiz. He said it was precious and sometin' as you could feel forebber—part of somethin' be treasures mighty—dat ef youse be careful, yoah chillens could hab it!

TROLENE.

It must be something wonderful! Part of that silver service he treasures so, or the skin of that tiger he fought so desperately?

UNCLE LIGE.

Nome, dat's not hit--

TROLENE.

What can it be, then? Uncle Lige, did he say?

UNCLE LIGE.

Nome, he nebber said nuffin, but I jes couldn't hope peepin', and what does you think I seed? It was a whole settin' of aigs from dat fine old black hen of his'n..

TROLENE.

(Laughing.) How do you know it was the black hen?

UNCLE LIGE.

Heah's de feder to prove it!

(Amid laughter Uncle Lige exits around house. Most of the guests have gone into house to see Mrs. Godez.)

TROLENE.

And Mrs. Johnson, too; I thought you were ill!!

MRS. JOHNSON.

(With big, black reticule on arm, and closely followed by a little black picanniny, with a bundle bigger than himself.) Yes, honey, I have been ailing considerably, but I just had to come to see your dear face once more. I brought that George Washington quilt along so that you could see it. Here, Rastus, unroll it so Miss Trolene can look at it. I knew you'd like it. Here's two squares of yours (taking it from reticule). I just brought it along so you could see it. I would give you this finished one (wistfully) only I've been working on it so long. Here's some pills to keep your blood from freezing when those awful Northerners strike you. I'll go in to your mother.

(John Talbot, who has been moodily pacing up and down, sees Trolene alone and comes hastily to her. Uncle Lige drives in, seated on box seat of old-fashioned coach.)

UNCLE LIGE.

Wheop! Hurray! Git up dar, Jeremia, don't let Queen do all de pullin'. Guilly, come on heah, you nigger! Youse a reglar slow-poke! (Hobbles down and comes to help her with grip.) I bet you won' come so slow an' stately-lak, when dem cowboys sez biff, bang, bang, and points a pistol at you so, and sez, dance to this!

AUNT GUILLY.

Oh, go on, nigger. I aint skeered ob dem cowboys, and I proves it by go'n'. You is de coward, caise you is stayin' heah.

UNCLE LIGE.

Somebody's get ter stay and take keer ob de house and de Missus' things. I jes wish I could go, so I'd show dem cowboys how to do things. To a real gent lak me, who's allus done things right, dem porely cowboys be lak skeeters or flies. All I gotter do is make my ole gun say biff, bang, and dem measly, pessiferous cowboys drop down dead; jes so.

AUNT GUILLY.

Why, nigger, I done heah de Missus jes beg you to go, say as how she teach you to be lak one of dem highferluttin butlers. I'll tell her you done change yeah mine!

UNCLE LIGE.

(Trembling and with a scary look in his eyes.) Don' you dare do dat, nigger. Ain't I done tell you de Missus need me heah. Besides I don' want no meddlin' wid my private 'fairs.

MRS. GODEZ.

(Comes out of house wiping her eyes, gazes around as though she could look enough to last always.) How I hate to leave this place—and all of you! Do you realize I have been here—always? I had hoped to live only a little while with my dear husband's memory and then let you take me over there to him. But I must cheer up for Trolenc's sake. Good-bye, all of you. (Walks down steps to coach.)

(Others come out and group around porch and look through door, etc. Trolenc and John join Mrs. Godez as she starts to coach. John helps them in, first Mrs. Godez, then Trolenc. Nervously arranges things in bottom of coach, arranges her skirts, so the door will shut; loathe to let them go.)

TROLENE.

(Embarrassed, puts out her hand.) Good-bye, John.

TALBOT.

Is there nothing I can do to make you stay?

TROLENE.

No.

TALBOT.

Surely there is something I can do to make you alter what you said?

TROLENE.

I am afraid not. (Pause; he looks intently at her; they shake hands.) In sweet remembrances, let us part.

TALBOT.

No! I've hopes of your return to me. Let us say—Good-bye!

(Amid loud "Git-ups" from Uncle Lige, the horses start up. Curtain comes quickly down.)

ACT II.—THE HOME OF LOUIS GODEZ.

Scene: Library with bay in right, with mahogany cases to ceiling, alternating with French windows; violet velvet curtains within bay to shut off whole bay. A hooded copper fireplace at one end; at rear of stair a stately entrance door; the furniture massive in design.

LOUIS GODEZ.

(Affectionately.) Well, Trolene, I have certainly never regretted the day you and your mother came to live with me. I felt I could never survive my dear wife's death and it made me understand so much the more your mother's position. I have lessened my own griefs in making your life pleasanter. My home is so pleasant since your arrival—I have no desire to go elsewhere. I fancy, too, it has not been such a bad thing for you. Both of you look healthy and happy.

TROLENE.

Neither have I regretted it. I have seen more of life here in a short time than I ever would have seen in the whole span of my existence on our plantation.

GODEZ.

Your mother, too, has a quiet enjoyment. Her life is beautifully spent in charity and love; the sharpened edge of her grief has worn off to sweet remembrance. How glad I am to have reclaimed such a flower as you for Israel! You are among your own people now. Do you not feel a difference?

TROLENE.

Yes, I do feel a great, a vast difference; I am at one with all around me, bound by the strong bonds of kinship, veritably imbedded in love; so satisfied and contented there is hardly an impetus to go further. Like the happy young bride, whose life all centers around and within her husband's life.

GODEZ.

Why want to go beyond when you have everything here?

TROLENE.

On the same principle you want other companions besides your sisters and brothers, no matter how dear they are..

GODEZ.

I wouldn't try to explore any worlds. There are so many beauties in this that will multiply day by day if you live within it.

TROLENE.

But my coming has made me feel and realize things I never knew before. There is a chasm, but it is like a mirage in a desert, sometimes here, sometimes there. When you have decided for yourself it isn't there, it isn't real, you fall right down! I see now your reasons for clanning and banding together, aside from the need of such a step because of persecution and oppression. For that purpose you do not use your strength enough. From a psychological standpoint, one is almost forced into it; you can never be quite sure just how the other party feels. Before I was alive to all this, I was happily comfortable. God knows whether you have done well or ill. I am not content to stay as you have placed me. I want my friends regardless of creed or nationality. I want them to feel the same toward me as my other friends—surely you have exaggerated!

GODEZ.

I'm afraid it's too true. You'll encounter it—often.

TROLENE.

I'll have to take the stabs and the thrusts then, from those who do feel that way. My life is too broad to stay within the radius of your circle. But now, with every step—there will always be the undercurrent, real or imaginary—the positive open stab that will bite and burn, or the fancied one my super-sensitiveness will conjure into reality..

GODEZ.

Yes, it means all that. There is nothing to lighten it but the comfort of your kind (patting her on shoulder). I see another meaning to your words. The symptoms of the disease cry aloud to everyone. You are in love; the man you expect to marry has a career before him—the future opening discloses many problems, demands careful study (teasingly). Come, Trolene, confess to a sympathizing uncle. I'll stand for no denial.

TROLENE.

I am not denying it, either his career or that I want to marry him. You are too discerning for us to ever try to fool you. He is coming here today to ask your consent..

GODEZ.

(Kisses her on forehead.) I am glad you are going to marry Meyer. Had I been asked to choose for you, I could not have selected a better. A very good partner; college-bred; has all the ear-marks of success, very popular, has held several offices, and is certainly holding his own in this race for Congress.

TROLENE.

All that is as it should be. I am happy over it, of course, but the main fact, the only thing that really matters is that we love each other dearly.

GODEZ.

All I can say then is thank Heaven, your love is so well directed. That's why I was so anxious for you to come before you formed any real attachments, for I always apprehended the possibility of your marrying outside. Not that I have any particular objection, but we both know such unions seldom express the sum total of happiness.

TROLENE.

Why, uncle, I always looked on you as broad and high-minded!

GODEZ.

I am broad-minded as regard the Christian part. I admire a man for loyalty to his faith. I also believe my judgment keen enough to discern a man in whatever guise he may appear. Only of your highest happiness was I thinking. I believe you have a better chance for marital felicity as it is. There are enough problems in life to combat without adding unnecessary ones to the overburdened list. You would then have chosen not only outside your home, but every step within. Here comes your mother, shall we tell her?

TROLENE.

She already knows—knew, I believe, before I did. She saw love plant the seed, watched it germinate, apprized me of it—I confessed! She is again living in mine the love episodes of her and dear father's life..

(Enter Mrs. Godez.)

GODEZ.

Well, Mary, Trolene has been telling me some wonderful things. It seems we must make an addition to this family very soon.

MRS. GODEZ.

Yes, I think we can expect it at almost any time. Yet I cannot be sorry, regardless of my own feelings; for my own marriage was so happy that I could not keep her from her own.

(Bell rings, butler ushers in George Meyer; all shake hands.)

GODEZ.

I think Trolene felt sorry for you, so acted as advance agent. We have just finished speaking of you and the purport of your visit. (Pause.) I will ease you of all restraint and speak myself. I wish you all the happiness that can and ought to come to two people who will be so ideally mated.

MEYER.

Thanks, Mr. Godez. (Bowling.) Very many thanks. You certainly

have relieved me. One's heart never palpitates so rapidly, nor breathes he with such exasperating gasps, gets his words with such preposterous slowness, as when he asks for the woman he loves. (Goes to Trolene, puts arm around her, and says, addressing Mrs. Godez: "May I, mother?"

(Before Mrs. Godez can reply butler ushers in Mrs. Wetterly and Mrs. Jones.))

TROLENE.

(Going to meet them.) Mrs. Wetterly! Why, how glad I am to see you. Mother, this is the lady I told you about meeting on the train. Uncle, you, too, must remember hearing of Mrs. Wetterly. Introduces Meyer.

MRS. GODEZ.

We are very glad to meet you.

TROLENE.

We truly shared our crust together; we were stranded on the wayside, miles from anything to eat—the track had been torn up by a wreck. There was not very much in the way of supplies on board; what little there was rose to fabulous prices and disappeared as if by magic.

MEYER.

People have been known to become friends under less strenuous conditions, so yours ought to have been cemented strongly..

TROLENE.

We had formed quite an acquaintance before the wreck and subsequent rise in the market..

MRS. WETTERLY.

Yes, we had; after so many things befell us the friendship was cemented. We promised, you remember, to see each other at our first opportunity..

TROLENE.

Yes, we did, but it has never been so I could pass through your part of the country. With the exception of your cards, I have heard nothing of you.

MRS. WETTERLY.

This has been my first chance, so you may know how glad I was when I found I must change cars here. It gave me the opportunity to avail myself of your kind invitations.

MEYER.

We are more than glad you came. Trolene has often spoken of how delightfully you had helped her to pass the long, tedious hours. She said a great many complimentary things about you, so that we were very anxious to meet you.

MRS. WETTERLY.

Thank you for telling me so many kind things. It is reciprocal. I wanted to see her again—she is as charming in her home as on the train.

MEYER.

Of course, I may be prejudiced, but I think it possible you'll find her more delightful here. She has an infinite number of charms; each varying posture seems to place her in a more favorable light, until one can scarcely decide in which she is the more captivating.

MRS. WETTERLY.

From what I have seen I think you are right. Your eulogies, accompanied by such animation, are—almost a revelation.

MEYER.

You have guessed aright; but I do not care now since she has consented..

(Enter butler with tea tray, followed by Aunt Guilly to assist; passes tea around while Aunt Guilly, in assisting, slowly gazes at Mrs. Wetterly and Mrs. Jones.))

AUNT GUILLY.

(Handing to Trolene.) Heah, honey, I've already fixed yours, eaise I

knows jes how you laks it.

TROLENE.

You've spoilt me, so I scarcely believe I could fix it for myself.

GODEZ.

(Continuing conversation with Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Weterly.) Yes, Meyer's speech was certainly a powerful one, and made clear much vile work, layers and layers deep. It took just such a keen analytical mind as his to discover such a labyrinth of political deviltry.

MRS. JONES.

I have heard much of Mr. Meyer. To me he has always presented a noble figure and I think he has made a splendid fight. It is strange that though he must be doing this to achieve his own ends, we never think of it that way, but feel that he has so helped the people he ought to have a rising vote of thanks. I think he will win out in spite of the fact he is a Jew. (She starts and colors.)

GODEZ.

(Sadly.) We forgive you like dogs who have had so many kicks that one more can scarcely matter. Besides you were so carried away you forgot your usual caution. I know that does weigh heavily against him, so much so that in his place I would not even try. But I believe that because he is a Jew, this time, will make him win out. Struggle is innate with him; he comes from those who, like truth, though crushed to earth, yet rise again. In spite of all they live on, multiplying and prosperous—not always having what they want, but making the most of what they get. The word Jew ought to be broadened and be synonomous with overcoming almost insuperable difficulties.

MRS. WETTERLY.

(Hearing the last of the conversation is astonished, face and bearing expressing scarcely concealed dislike.) So you are Jews then! All of you? Your names and a certain cast of features made me think so! I have not had the inclination and scarcely have taken the time to familiarize myself with the race, so I suppose I could be forgiven for not recognizing remote traits. But surely not you, too, Trolene.

TROLENE.

(Sarcastically.) Et tu Brute! Yes, I too, Mrs. Wetterly. You see before you, so be careful, you stand in the very midst of those peculiar, astounding, horrible creatures you have read and talked about, from time immemorial and have never really known. Through the long, shadowy vista of years you can see the Jew hounded by persecution, driven from land to land no sooner than he had taken root. The worthy ones are so busy working out their own destiny that you do not know them. So you think the caricatures in your papers, the Shylock type, depict the race. Even the gamin in the street feels he has a right to insult us. A peculiar, penetrating, subtle, untranslatable creature moving on and waxing greater, though from the beginning of time a tarantula-footed world has kicked from a million angles. A race upon which all peoples at all times, singly and conjointly, have felt and thought that it was their particular province to wage a war of extermination. Nations have fought and wrangled over an infinite variety of things, but upon this one subject they are all agreed. Destiny unfulfilled, we remain without a country, the leaven in the mass.

MRS. GODEZ.

You will tire Mrs. Weterly and she is your guest.

MEYER.

(Laughing.) That's 'just it—she can't escape.

TROLENE.

I want her to see the other side; that's the finest education any one can have—to see the other side. Do not judge us by our lowest type. A large per cent has remained on top, though a number are at the bottom.

Altered and forced by circumstances into the lowest places, from generation to generation, is evolved the type you from your vantage are pleased to call a Jew! You see in me one who has had a more propitious life, broadened and modernized, just a vague suggestion of the features or traits you characterize Hebraic, so dim that amid different surroundings you did not recognize them. So like you in every way, yet just that little difference—enough to segregate me, to mark me, causing you to level at me all the anathema of pent up prejudice, hurl at me, "You, too, a Jewess!"

CODEZ.

I, too, am a Jew. Much nearer the conception you have of a Jew than Trolene or Meyer. I am proud to be one. My "Yechashbrief" is in golden letters, showing generations of high priests; intellectual and noble forefathers. Were Israel an established nation today, rightfully I would stand close to the throne, if not upon it. (Sadly.) But enough of that; it is not of my individual history I would speak; I only mentioned it because the popular opinion is that we have no ancestry. You know the men and women, too. We live in the Bible. We have our histories to be proud of. When we were a nation with rights to uphold, we fought; since then we have fought only as units, then merely tolerated, sometimes publicly disgraced, rarely accredited with what we had achieved. We have today leaders in every branch of life, more than you have an idea of, for many are silent about their race. We who know it, also are silent. (Pause. Paces back and forth.) It is as I told you, Trolene. Better keep within the circle. You may have your friends outside; either they ignore you because you are a Jewess, or decide to like you in spite of the fact—the thing is always there. Just do one little thing unsatisfactorily, first they straightway hurl at you with all the invidious invective of inborn Semitic prejudice—"You are a Jew!" "What else could I expect from a Jew!" "I was warned against your nationality!" As though they had been playing with fire and it had become uncontrollable. All of your qualities, good and indifferent, are forgotten in the engulfing word Jew! (Covers his face with his hands.)

MEYER.

I cannot say I feel as strongly as my future Uncle. However, I am forced to think something on the subject, as it has been quite frequently presented to me. Sometimes the very air I breathe is pregnant with it, at others I do not know such a thing exists. I am not proud of it—a moment, Mrs. Weterly—neither am I ashamed of it. All of that is part of myself, my endowment. I accept it. I am not going to thrust it upon you at introduction, neither will I withhold it upon inquiry. The religion is too beautiful a thing for that. As for the race, it is not all angel, neither is it all devil. We have a great deal on the credit side; we may not be better than other races, but we certainly are no worse. Statistics show it has a smaller per cent of criminals and prostitutes—though I must admit that for a time that small per cent has made quite a stir. It is known because that is usually the first thing pointed out. We have very few beggars and vagabonds, those few confine their solicitations to their own race. While supporting its own charities, it has never, and I hope never will, refuse the charity and good cause of others. The one occupation you blame them for was forced upon them ages ago; when all other livelihood was cut off, they succeeded in that because they used their brain—it has become keen, razor-like through centuries of use. Remember it was their one possession when the eyes of the covetous were cast upon them; they were driven with that a little more sharpened to another country, and so on until today. Our tenure is never sure. I could make even you proud of us, if I could tell you all things I've heard my forefathers say, but you've heard enough. Whatever we may think, it is not to be an issue in my life! (Pause.) I do not want to be separated, designated, pointed out on all

occasions as a Jew! I am an American citizen, born here, bred here; I want not only the legal rights, but the real privileges that every other American enjoys. I am ready to give my country time, money and life blood; and I want everything she gives her other children. It is not right we should forever go around in a circle, fearful of one step cut!

MRS. WETTERLY.

I have certainly called forth some arguments. I have added to my knowledge by seeing the other side. I understand what you mean, Mr. Meyer. I hope in your case it will not be a deterring factor. You certainly are the highest class, the fairest-minded, the whitest Jews I ever saw.

MEYER.

Thank you, Mrs. Weterly, but don't you see in the very midst of your evident kindness, you still designate us. We do not want that; we want to be great writers, great doctors, and so on, as such; not great for Jews. Even criminals, it is always the Jew—let it be the man, don't blame the race for what one man does. In writing our history designate us, classify us; except then, let us be one with you.

TROLENE.

I feel as you do, George. I also fear that at some time this will be a potent issue in your career. Should it ever come, I wonder what would be your choice. I sometimes wonder if it has been a continuation of circumstances or lack of prejudice here that has helped thus far (smiles), or that you are just you and they couldn't help themselves. You know and I know that people of acknowledged Jewish faith have never held the highest votive offices; the gift of most of the appointive places is gallery play, or to pull over the Jewish constituency! A barrier almost insurmountable added to the usual terrible difficulties.

MEYER.

(Musingly.) I have often heard among ourselves, of course, that such and such a person, though prominent, rose no higher because he was a Jew. I do not know whether it is that or something else. Unless I encounter it, I will not let myself think it. This is a big high-minded country; the something else seems too puerile and unbelievable for it, and savors too much of the dark ages. But if it ever should come between me and my ambition, my career, I fear that I should juggle with it. If that did not succeed, God knows what I should do. (All silent for a moment.)

MRS. WETTERLY.

You are the Mr. Meyer who is making the heated race for Congress?

MEYER.

The very same.

MRS. WETTERLY.

The election is over, is it not?

MEYER.

Only the votes to be counted and the public notified of the results.

MRS. WETTERLY.

You must be on tenter-hooks until you know the outcome.

MEYER.

Of course, I am anxious. I kept in touch until I came here. My principal nervousness is over with now, for I realize I have done all I could do, this time.

GODEZ.

Did the subject we have discussed so heatedly present itself in any phase?

MEYER.

Only a few minor thrusts. There were so many things to fight about, the others were so busy covering their own faults, defending themselves,

they had no time to attack me. (Pause.) Should I have thought my religion or race, which you will, such a potent factor for failure, I am afraid I should never have had the courage to take the initial steps.

TROLENE.

You should not let it affect you that way. Fight the harder!

MEYER.

I would have been so imbued with the idea of failure that my thoughts would have colored my actions, or been transmitted to my opponents, and so failed ignominiously. I have been sure of my success until now. See how fast your seeds of doubt germinate! I feel that worlds may have been meant where nothing was expressed, or things meaningless to me may have meant much to others. Has it been a silent potent force acting against me, so powerful that everything I said was futile, so engulfing that none of my qualifications could count? (Shudders.) A laughing stock that I should even try—a mere pigmy! What part of all of this is inherent, what part barnacles encrusting the real you, can be shaken off. (Passionately.) Why did you let me make a fool of myself? Why did you let me try?

TROLENE.

(Looking steadily at him.) There is nothing to shake off. Your inheritance is alright. Without individual hope, one is lost—carve out your own career..

MEYER.

How can you keep this hope when the graves open up and show so many buried ones!

(Silence. All seem to feel impending failure. A newsboy passes window.)

NEWSBOY.

(Calling out.) Extra! Extra! Tells all about the great political fight and who wins out. ..Correct issue. Daily Record, five cents.

(Aunt Guilly rushes out to buy a copy; all is tense within. Aunt Gilly comes in excited and claps her hands.)

AUNT GUILLY.

Marse George elected. I'se gwine get to go to Washington, and show dem Yankees what a pretty Missus I'se got.

MEYER.

(Seizes the paper from Aunt Guilly—glances at it.) Yes, in spite of the fact, I win! (Congratulations.)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

Several years have elapsed. The place, Washington. The scene, a very spacious home: a beautiful stair in rear, dividing at landing; right of stair a door leading into card and supper rooms; to the left of stage, an alcove screened by flowers and silken curtains—an ideal place for privacy and rest. An entertainment is in progress as curtain rises.

HOSTESS.

(Shaking hands.) How do you do, Mr. Lane? I am so glad to see you this evening.

MR. LANE.

Did you think I would be afraid or ashamed to come? I am too seasoned a veteran to chafe at defeat of a bill..

HOST.

I am glad to see you receive it with such equanimity.

(Mr. Lane mingles with other guests present, as do all who come in.)

GUEST I.

I see the English Ambassador has his wife with him this year..

GUEST II.

I no longer wonder about his leaving her at home last year, the miraculous part is that he had the courage to present her this year..

GUEST III.

(Joining the gossips.) Did you hear that Leroy was going to resign?

GUEST I.

You mean the secretary?

GUEST III.

Yes.

GUEST II.

Hush, here he comes now.

GUEST I.

He can't hear. Tell us about it..

GUEST III.

I know none of the wherefores, only the rumor as I have stated it. I hear the President thinks of appointing Kohn in his place. I understand the reporters will have something in the papers tomorrow to feel the public pulse, as it were..

GUEST II.

Surely not. Why he's a Jew.

(Enter Trolene—Mrs. George Meyer.)

GUEST III.

The President is not so popular. It couldn't hurt, it might help him. Think what a big bunch of votes it means should he need them thrown his way; much newspaper notoriety and a number of magazine articles on broad-mindedness. You know that talk..

GUEST I.

Here's Ambassador Sloan; he surely is a political body..

GUEST III.

Yes, the weight of his presence is always enough to displace surrounding substance.

GUEST IV.

Yes, but look at his wife, who has forgotten the lapse of years. Youth in brushing past has left only the curls and the simper on the gaunt form of age..

(Enter Bolloter and Clancy.)

HOSTESS.

It is a delight to welcome you here tonight. We are always so glad to see you, though you give us little chance.

HOST.

The affairs of nations hang heavy over their heads.

BOLLOTER.

Yes, we just left business and have to go back, too. Having a little respite, we were glad of a chance to drop in for a while.

CLANCY.

(Politely.) We always enjoy your entertainments, know the best is to be found here—and we are combining business with pleasure. After leaving you, we thought to find Talbot and Meyer here..

HOST.

How about Meyer? Are you still thinking of putting him up for nomination?

CLANCY.

Yes. If our crowd does put him up there's small chance for defeat. The right man nominated, our side is almost certain of victory, there's such upheaval in the ranks of the others..

HOST.

Are you sure he's the right man?

CLANCY.

Yes, he's very popular, and plenty of reserve force.

TROLENE.

(To hostess.) Please pardon my delay; it was unavoidable. Please place me wherever you wish and I promise to stay there until you tell me to leave.

HOSTESS.

It isn't so bad as that. The worst punishment in store for you is to stand next my husband..

TROLENE.

(Turning to Clancy.) Have you seen anything of my very busy husband? I really think I ought to leave town so that he would not be burdened with a wife.

CLANCY.

Better stay here. We were saying some very flattering things of him just now..

BOLLOTER.

I am glad to see you looking so well tonight, Mrs. Meyer. If you see our husband, tell him we are looking for him. (Pass on and are greeted by some of guests present.)

JOHNSON.

I see you are here; a great many of our party are here scattered around—me of them have gone to our assembly rooms. (Closer.) Are you sure Meyer's the right man?

BOLLOTER.

Yes, on that we are settled. We just want all of our men there to get the thing through, get our forces lined up so that everything will be decided before the convention comes off. He is one of the men most before the public; has a clean record, is brilliant, with all the attributes that will make our party win, or at least give us the best chance we know of. I am sure he'll be nominated, because all the leading factors want him. Our odds are stacked right. All we need do is play them right, and we can nominate him.

JOHNSON.

Are you sure we are so powerful?

BOLLOTER.

As sure as one ever is in a political game. I didn't say our party will win. We haven't come to that; but our nominee will. When you see who's reared and get a little more information about the situation, you'll feel as I do.

CLANCY.

Our party has more chance to win this time than ever, because the other side will put up the present occupant, and you know how very un-

popular he is.

BOLLOTER.

(Looking at watch.) We can't wait here any longer for Meyer and Talbot. We may find them there. Tonight's about the last night we have to fix things before we go to the convention. (Exit.)

GUEST I.

There go our pillars of State.

GUEST II.

You mean arch plotters. If some of the schemes that are hatched in those brains did not miscarry, Europe herself would be overthrown.

GUEST III.

I'm tired of plotters and politicians. I've been looking at Mrs. Meyer. She always makes you forget other things.

JOHNSON.

Mrs. Meyer? Her genial kindness, wit, brains and beauty make her irresistible.

GUEST II.

You certainly are an admirer. I understand her health is not so good. That is why she has remained almost in obscurity before..

GUEST I.

It does seem as if she would want to hear some of those thrilling speeches her husband makes.

GUEST III.

Her husband certainly is a power, one to be reckoned with. He has made such wonderful strides in the Senate.

GUEST I.

Here comes John Talbot. I wonder how long his reign will last.

GUEST II.

He seems to be as much in the ascendant as ever. He not only has power, but wields it in ways untold, not always so creditable. He holds the so-called big men in his hands; crushes them or lets them expand as he will..

GUEST III.

He's the last notch in political intrigue.

JOHNSON.

I am going to leave you people. I've been debating it with myself. (Laughingly.) It's unsafe to leave you, but it's risky to be seen with you.

GUEST I.

The hostess is leaving for the card rooms, I suppose. We'll hear some good things there. Often in the excitement of play they let slip words that afterwards can be beautifully pieced together.

GUEST II.

I prefer to take my chances in the supper room. One gets such delicious things to eat here. Well, frankly, I've had very little today.

GUEST III.

I see Mrs. Capital in the other room. I want to see what she has on. She leads the dress market and has a corner on the society column on Sunday.

(John Talbot just greeting the host and hostess as they pass out, comes to Trolene, stops bewildered.)

TALBOT.

You, Trolene! After all these years!

TROLENE.

Isn't it splendid to meet again?

TALBOT.

It certainly is, only——

TROLENE.

It makes one feel young again..

TALBOT.

That all depends on the memories with which one has lived. But tell me (he winces) what is your name, for I know you have—changed it since we last met? Let us be seated first. (They walk to alcove and sit on sofa.) Now, tell me.

TROLENE.

My name; my, I thought you knew.

TALBOT.

No, I have never wanted to hear..

TROLENE.

Why hear now?

TALBOT.

It is part of the inevitable now.

TROLENE.

(Laughing.) Listen then, and I will unfold the great mystery. I am Mrs. George Meyer, the wife of your friend.

TALBOT.

So you are Mrs. Meyer, the much talked of wife of the very much talked of statesman! Trolene Godez and Mrs. Meyer the same. After all these years to meet and under such strange circumstances.

TROLENE.

For a while I was not really sure, never connected you with the John Talbot, but one glance tonight made it a certainty. How glad I am to know my old playmate has risen so high. (With an open, cordial smile she looks up at him.)

TALBOT.

(Looking at her a long time, as though drinking in every feature.) I, too, am glad. My feelings are too mixed for utterance.

TROLENE.

Why, you are too engrossed in weightier matters for such a small thing to affect you.

TALBOT.

(Again looks a long time at her.) Are you happy, Trolene?

TROLENE.

Yes, very happy—that is, in love. In other regards I could hardly say I am unhappy. I would not make it that strong. I just eliminate it from my vocabulary..

TALBOT.

We usually let it slip with youth and other things. But there are some things we never forget; some images remain constantly with us, no matter what sort of lives we lead. Lost hopes like strong diseases pass on, leaving sores that never heal..

TROLENE.

One as powerful as you ought to have numberless unguents for your political sores.

TALBOT.

I heal those with triumphs. There is only one thing in my life unforgettable. You. Don't start, for I must talk now that we have met. After you left I wrote to you again and again until wearied of no answer I decided to go to you, either to persuade you or force you to accept me. On the eve of my departure, there came a letter to one of the girls announcing our marriage. I cared not to whom, the act was enough. Almost immediately, without considering cost or consequences, I asked Sallie to marry me. From that time on I have never heard one word about you. Until I could tear your image from my heart, I would refrain from inquiry—that as all I could do for Sallie.

TROLENE.

John Talbot has been so much in the spot-light one could not help

hearing of him; with so many points identical, it is strange I never saw you were he.

TALEOT.

I imagined you married to some rich man, a pleasant, gentlemanly fellow—a foil to your beauty, an accompaniment to the theme of Trolene. For your husband I have treasured and reserved an intense animosity! To think after this lapse of years, I should meet and discover that George Frank Meyer, the man for whom I have entertained a real, true friendship, whose talents I have so admired, and of whom I am the staunchest of supporters, is your husband!

TROLENE.

No one save I could have appreciated your friendship, counsel and support more than he. It gives me intensest pleasure to know my old playmate and husband are such friends.

TALEOT.

And you never knew it was I?

TROLENE.

I was not sure. Often when George has spoken of something you had done for him, I thought to tell him of our former friendship, and have him bring you to my house.

TALEOT.

Then he doesn't know?

TROLENE.

Of course not. He would have insisted on your spending week-ends at our home.

TALEOT.

Possibly it is well that you did not.

TROLENE.

Why?

TALEOT.

It is well in any walk of life, but especially applicable to a political one, not to take any chances, but know to a certainty just what will be the effect of such and such a move. (Silence.)

TROLENE.

You mean to say then—

TALEOT.

Nothing. I was only making a favorite statement of mine.

TROLENE.

You might have enjoyed coming to our home. It was beautiful there. It would have been a rest, if not a positive pleasure, after the strenuousness of the city..

TALEOT.

Some pleasures are best untasted—like wines, they often go to the head.

TROLENE.

You only confirm my idea of wishing to remain in obscurity. My husband is powerful enough alone.

TALEOT.

A beautiful wife is always a convenient adjunct.

TROLENE.

I did not know just how I might bungle things at inopportune moments, so I remained in the background. It is against my better judgment that I have this winter emerged. I only hope my coming to the front will not affect his career..

TALEOT.

How silly of you! You could never be anything but a help. But tell me, have you never regretted your choice? Do you love him? Do you feel for him—what you never could have felt for me?

TROLENE.

Yes, without disparaging you, for my preference could never mean that. I loved him then more than I ever thought I could love anyone—it seems to be gathering momentum as it goes through the years. Instead of treasuring fancied wrongs, you should rejoice with me. Especially as you have a wife whom by now you must love.

TALFOT.

She is a jolly companion, a model wife. But let us not bring her into the discussion. One more question—old acquaintanceship emboldens me to ask—is he a Jew?

TROLENE.

Why do you want to know?

TALFOT.

Only because I remember so well your reason for leaving our old home. I merely wanted to know how the scale had balanced.

TROLENE.

You and my husband are friends—why did you never ask him?

TALFOT.

We've had too many other things to discuss. There was no reason why I should ask him..

TROLENE.

There is no reason why you should ask me. Some questions too impertinent to be asked, if asked, are best unanswered..

TALFOT.

Things have gone on unanswered long enough between us. Do you intend to answer? (Whimsically.) Merely to know if he possessed something I lack! Are you ashamed of your answer?

TROLENE.

No, but it seems strange, knowing Meyer as you do, you—do not—know what he is. You have some other reason for asking..

TALFOT.

Then you confess?

TROLENE.

I confess nothing.

TALFOT.

Your very negatives have affirmed it. To think I have nurtured a Jew! Of all men! That I have watched him germinate, that I have so tempered the soil and watered it, that he has sprouted, shot up and branched out, until now he is a good-sized tree—if left alone, will grow to enormous proportions, blossom forth in resplendent glory. But—unfavorable winds and storms can come. The axe can bite its way through vital parts. I have all kinds of power and I know how to wield it. (Looks at her.) I never get an appealing conscience or exotic ideas stand in the way.

TROLENE.

No! No!! No!!! You could not be so cruel; there are other ways to strike me, than through him..

TALFOT.

It is a pity to strike so fair a tree—with such certain aim, but there is, no other course so effectual. You must know it is not you I wish to strike. Can't you see I love you as much if not more than ever? That maturer judgment nor years have quenched the thirst for you? In the beginning I never loved a Jew; now I doubly hate one. This is my chance for revenge on the accursed thing that separated us.

TROLENE.

(Excitedly.) It was not that, it never could have weighed one moment on the balance had I loved you. (Catches his hand.) Please, I beg you, do nothing to hurt his future. He has every qualification for a leader, his blood has gone out to achieve what he has. You, who are his friend, look

only at what you valued in him; pause in remembrance of our friendship, do nothing to cut short his career. It is his very life. If you cannot be persuaded to countenance his race or religion—call it what you will—if you cannot lend him your powerful support, do not wreak your vengeance upon him.

TALFOT.

You speak well, Trolene, but your words fall on barren soil.

TROLENE.

Not if you loved me as you say. Our marriage being unalterable, should be relegated to the past. (Looks at him.) The love that could thrive un-nourished through so many barren years ought to so ennoble you as to cause you to place him where I want him because of me.

TALFOT.

What dead-as-dust ideas you have! That is not human.

TROLENE.

It could be made so, call it altruistic then—divine.

TALFOT.

That is not part of my ethics at present. I could not hope to reach so high.

TROLENE.

Oh, yes, you could. That is the real you. Leave me out of the question. Do you think it right to blame George? It is no fault of his. Where is your golden rule?

TALFOT.

That is church property and should repose safely in its archives except on Sunday.

TROLENE.

You could not have done the things you have if there were not running through the warp and woof of your nature plenty of threads of nobility—if I could only gather them!

TALFOT.

Solely for your own purpose—you are trying to make me think myself noble. While even now (looking steadily at her) my mind dwells with strange insistency on what you said about our marriages. They are not unalterable, not a trace of disgrace need linger. It is as easily arranged—as your dress.

TROLENE.

(Aghast.) Do you mean—

TALFOT.

Just that. (Catches her hand.) I know what I want when I want it—the one thing I have always wanted and never been able to get. No means are above or below my efforts to achieve it.

TROLENE.

From your own selfish standpoint you could not afford to risk such a thing, all the efforts and achievements of your life would be as nothing then.

TALFOT.

You evidently do not know the men who have helped to make my success. (Eyes half veiled.) If it is matrimony to which you object—

TROLENE.

(Gasps and pales.) Do I look like that kind?

TALFOT.

You look so beautiful and bewitching, I have so long craved you that (jerks her to him, kissing her vehemently; she pulls away).

TROLENE.

My God, you could never know how you have stabbed and hurt me. You are so goaded on by your desires, the feelings of others are crushed beneath. You are so encrusted with selfishness there seems not one vulner-

able spot at which to aim. But you must have some sense of justice, and some vestige of the heart you once had. I am going to plead once more to the best that is in you. For any unconscious wrong I have done you, you are more than repaid in the stabs you have given me. Once more I beg you, I pray you, I beseech you, I implore you forget the fancied wrong, think only of the man, noble, high-minded, able, ready for any emergency, qualified in the highest, capable of appreciating your friendship and worthy of your powerful support. Do anything you wish to me, but do not visit wrath upon his head..

TALEOT.

What I have forced from you of him has obscured all else. I could no longer believe in his ability, nor care to have his friendship. As for you (shrugs his shoulders and waves her aside as though he would not waste another thought upon her).

(He walks out; at the same time some of the men of his party enter in friendly converse with Meyer and Bolloter.)

BOLLOTER.

(With his hand on Meyer's shoulder.) Well, George, we have all agreed you are the right man for the place. We feel sure of success with you in the saddle.

MEYER.

But Talbot?

BOLLOTER.

Talbot had everything fixed before he left the meeting. The reporters have been besieging us for news. We thought it best not to give out anything just yet. We want to find Talbot—he can fix things up in such fine style. Let him give the glowing items to the hungry press.

MEYER.

Thank you for the honor; if we win I shall do everything in my power to be worthy of the place. I never could begin to tell you what this means to me. Here comes Talbot, we can speak with him now. (Puts out hand for a friendly clasp.)

TALEOT.

(Ignoring it.) I hope I have come in time, before you put any chimerical hopes in your friend's breast.

CLANCY.

Our friend, you mean..

TALEOT.

No, not ours. You noticed I did not return to the meeting. For the sake of our party, I was delving deeply into our would-be candidate's history. I found an unexpected clue and followed it. I was just returning to the meeting.

BOLLOTER.

The meeting is over.

TALBOT.

Over! Without my returning?

CLANCY.

When you left you said nothing of returning; as you had arranged everything, we did not expect you.

TALBOT.

And how did things go?

BOLLOTER.

As you had ordered it. Meyer's the man..

MEYER.

So you see I am glad you hunted up my record so thoroughly—I want everything above board.

TALBOT.

(Sneeringly.) Not everything, Meyer..

MEYER.

What do you mean?

TALBOT.

We'll come to that later; others must be fixed first. The papers?

BOLLOTER.

Have nothing; we have come to you for that.

TALBOT.

Thank goodness for that. We will call a meeting later and rush a straw man in, or take the most possible one at hand. For in the interest of the country, Meyer's nomination at all hazards must be prevented..

ALL.

Why, you were his most enthusiastic endorser!

TALBOT.

And his sincerest friend, I might add. But for the welfare of the Nation, which we all have at heart, it cannot be. I told you I had learned something. Has it ever occurred to you that our friend here never mentions his nationality nor his religion. Look at him closely and see if you do not discern something foreign in him, some trace of a persecuted race—he is a Jew! (They all look at Meyer for confirmation or denial.)

MEYER.

Of course I am a Jew. I have never tried to conceal it, nor to mislead you; nor have I ever tried to deny it. My religion is too sacred a thing to be bandied about, flung in the face of every passerby. I am as much an American as any of you, for I was born and bred as an American citizen, and my forefathers have lived here for generations. I do not know what religion any of you profess, nor what foreign blood runs in your veins, but if I thought you fitted for a place and it were in my power to help, you certainly would have my support. I ask you to judge me as a man, and my fitness for the place we are speaking of. You know that I have a clean, straight record, my constituents are pleased with me. You, yourselves, have just been pleased to speak of my popularity, ability, power and dominion over men. You are too broad-minded a body to let such senile reasons—fit only for medieval days—prevent you from selecting a man whom you have all along preferred..

CLANCY.

(Looking at Talbot before speaking.) Very few of your race have risen so high as you, politically—there must be a reason.

BOLLOTER.

(Hedging.) Of course.

MEYER.

(Sarcastically.) The reason is very evident. The only wonder is that they live at all. It is different—you are liberal and intellectual, like the age we are living in and the history we are making.

CLANCY.

Personally we are hurt—we hate for this issue to come up.

BOLLOTER.

I believe in following the lines of least resistance. I haven't the courage to furnish a precedent..

TALBOT.

That is too wild; we would be dealing in firebrands.

MEYER.

Epochs in history have been created by men striking out for themselves; breaking down precedent.

TALBOT.

They usually bled, too; while the next generation or two rolled around and got the results. We do not care to make epochs. We want our nominee elected. Everything is brought to light in a race as difficult and sharp as this. Suppose it should become known that you are a Jew?

MEYER (Sarcastically.)

Men have been known to win with worse things than that against them. You are men of such brilliant mentality, so learned in the arts of intrigue, dyed-in-the-wool diplomats, such veteran campaigners, the very ne plus ultra of your art, you surely could keep such a calamity hidden.

BOLLOTTER.

We are not prejudiced as you might think; I admire the Jewish people—to me you are a marvelous race and we owe a great deal to you. (Puts hands in vest and begins in an oratorical way.) All down the pages of sacred and profane history—

MEYER.

Yes, Mr. Bolloter, I know just what you are going to say. I've heard it before. All your beautiful, high-flown speeches delivered from your pulpits, and used with telling effects by your best orators, used appropriately to ease us of our money or to lure a wary vote.

BOLLOTTER.

Come, not so bad as that.

MEYER.

Not until you are touched. That there is a prejudice I now unfortunately know; it is strong, intense, elemental in the lower classes, acquiesced in and tolerated by the middle classes, beautifully veneered in the upper circles. You laud us to the highest in the abstract, but one touch of the concrete is enough to uncork your bottled invective.

TALBOT.

It is for the country, I tell you, not ourselves. We feel the same to you as we did before. Everyone knows of the clannishness of your race—the whole country would be overrun by you!

MEYER.

We could be no worse than the trusts and monopolies that now infest the country. Give us a chance to show what we can do. Try it as a novelty then—novelties have swept the country before..

TALBOT.

I don't care for novelties. The tacit consensus of opinion is to keep you out of power; this is our country and we propose to keep it.

MEYER.

It is only so because you have a majority. Our people do not use what power they have, if they did—they prefer to go in the paths they know, to suffering the pangs and heart-aches I now endure. You have no right to tell us we shall go so far and yet no further, and we have no right to accept your mite. We give of everything we have, and we ought to have our recognition and representation, and we do not want it as Jewish, but as citizens. This is no more your country than mine. I've heard you boast of your English ancestry; most of you present are only here a generation or two. This is an amalgamated country. You wouldn't let a real American hold an office if you could help. I have no doubt were you in my place at present and it were necessary to prove yourselves American, you could trace direct descent from Pocahontas, or some lesser light of the Red race.

TALBOT.

However, we are in possession and we do not propose to foster unnecessary trouble.

MEYER.

You wouldn't be. Jews have the power of assimilation, if they are only allowed to use it. Since you persist in thinking of me solely as a Jew, then help to nominate me and fight for my election, and I will show you how one can rule. You know how we ruled when we had a nation. Look down the line and you will see our immemorial characteristic of making a success of every undertaking to which we turn our keenly sharpened brain.

Tottering enterprises have risen to flourishing conditions under our management. I suppose we could loot the treasury, nourish the trusts and practice the noble art of graft. As for your other complaint I will take my oath to it that I will not prefer a man or give him more consideration because he is of my faith.

TALBOT.

That all sounds very well, but we could never be sure of you. We can't afford to take the chance.

EOLLOTER.

Meyer, I like you—and I feel you ought to have the place. We were ready to give it to you before this issue came up—let's get rid of the issue. Become one with us, so that we can be sure of you. One Jew less in the world would make no difference. Then should this ever come up we could come out joyfully and say that you had foresworn it, that you preferred to be and were one of us. That if nothing else would make you win out. Come, say you will, then this will be forgotten and the place is yours.

MEYER.

(Staring straight ahead, cover his face with his hands.) God, do not make it so hard as all that. Put me through any other ordeal! Year in and year out have I carefully woven this fabric—everything that did not tend to make it stronger, that might let it warp or break, has been cast aside! Everything I ever wanted, every possession and desire of my life, has been subverted to this one thing! All these years wading through the depth of darkest despair, every feverish fiber within urging me on to the coveted goal now in sight. My very soul within me urges me onward! Is this a part of me—haven't I a right to cast off what impedes me? I could cast it off, and as the years went by and my strength increased, I could make reparation. This heritage of a race without a country was given me without my knowledge. Why should I give the death knell to my future by clinging to it? I know of no particular good I have done for Israel. What harm could my defection cause? (Paces floor. Talbot looks on sneeringly, for in either case he has won.) The most jealous and avenging God could not exact such a pennance. It would be a chance to prove to all the world how a descendant of Solomon could rule. I shall try to so temper every circumstance in conjunction with sagacity, ability, firmness and justice as to make my position an example for all time. My renegade body will be the bridge over which Israel will cross to regions of higher freedom. The chasm once spanned, the road will be easy for other aspirants. Though the first shock from knowledge would cause sorrow, possibly loathing, in future thinking of the heights I reached they would be brought to look more leniently on the steps I climbed. Gentlemen, I believe—I have a right to—say—

TALBOT.

(Sneeringly.) Yes? I feared as much.

TROLENE (Who has been a concealed listener.)

(Rushing from alcove to Meyer.) No, no, no! Do not decide so quickly. I know what it means to you, but you couldn't. It would be a spectre at every feast. Israel does need you, she has withstood all oppression, fought struggles, travailed for you. She needs you to stand out clear and strong as her heir; she has withstood all contrary arts and combinations. She expects perpetuation in us. We are her hope and if the best of us continually forsake, it will leave her only dregs. (As in a vision.) Can you not see them as they land, with their hastily tied bundles and paltry household effects? The anxious mothers, hopeful children, the patriarchal fathers, uprooted, transplanted without much chance of life in foreign soil? Though hounded and persecuted, unendingly, through the centuries, marked with the searching beady eye, the gestures of diffidence and humility, he still loves his God, clings more closely to his religion and his ideals. Such are not to be

laughed at and scorned; if we only see what made them so. They come nearer, the patriarchial grandfather, high-bred, scholarly, the old worn-out-before-their-time women, persecuted to the dumb submission of despair, work-hardened men, hounded and anxious, the younger women, glorious-eyed, surcharged with the woe of centuries, the children, offspring of a marked race, progeny of destiny, too young for understanding, yet feeling the strange weight. In the face of all there glows the lambient flame of hope—they have reached their haven. They look to us, to you and me, who have the will, the strength and the power, to do.

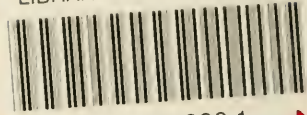
(Trolene keeps her hand on Meyer's shoulders. The others stand expectantly around; Meyer stands dazed. Then all look of indcision leaves; an exalted one comes over his features.)

MEYER.

Gentlemen, above the tangled mass of my own desires, there soars a higher (puts his arm around Trolene.) There can be no choice!

CURTAIN.

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